



Ending Homelessness

A Proposal for a Collaborative Provincial-Municipal Co-Design and Implementation of a Blueprint to End Homelessness in Ontario

December 8, 2021

A Message from the AMO President and the Chair of AMO's Affordable Housing and Homelessness Task Force

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is a non-partisan, non-profit association representing municipal governments across the province. Municipal governments work through AMO to achieve shared goals and meet common challenges. One such challenge of increasing concern is homelessness that exists amidst a housing affordability crisis. Homelessness in Ontario is persistent, growing, and becoming more complex to address. It is taking a devastating toll on individuals and communities.

Therefore, AMO is inviting the provincial government to collaborate with municipal human service system managers to jointly co-design and implement a Blueprint of actions to end homelessness in Ontario. This is an achievable goal with time and there is a moral and economic imperative to act now. It is in the interest of all people in the province.

The goal of our proposal is to advance a conversation beyond the existing initiatives on how to comprehensively address the homelessness crisis in Ontario and support healthy and prosperous communities. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of increased cooperation among different levels of government and of governance structures that enhance intergovernmental coordination so that residents' needs are effectively addressed.

It is our hope that this proposal will be embraced by government given the shared interest in a successful outcome. I would like to thank AMO's Affordable Housing and Homelessness Task Force and the municipal service managers who provided valuable input, as well as the AMO Board of Directors, for renewing their call to end homelessness. AMO is not alone. We are joined with the chorus of voices in a growing movement. Many have advocated for years, and we hope to leverage their good work and momentum to take concrete action.

Jamie McGarvey
AMO President and Mayor of Parry Sound
Chair, AMO's Affordable Housing and Homelessness Task Force

Introduction

While much has been done by all orders of government to mitigate the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on homeless people, more is needed to address the issue once and for all and to ultimately end homelessness. There is an opportunity to seize on the inter-governmental collaboration and public attention to the issue that now exists. The proposal is designed to build on this momentum and to develop a comprehensive approach with all governments and partners engaged, including homeless people themselves.

Finding solutions to address the housing affordability and concurrent homelessness crisis is a priority for AMO's Board. The association's Affordable Housing and Homelessness Task Force is actively working to provide ongoing advice. The task force is comprised of municipal elected officials, senior staff, and sector association representatives involved in housing and homelessness prevention from across Ontario. AMO regularly seeks advice from key organizations on the front lines of housing and homelessness services. This includes the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers' Association (NOSDA), the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA), the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada - Ontario Region (CHF-ON), the Housing Services Corporation (HSC), the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS). The task force has also benefited from regular touch points with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) on housing and homelessness matters.

This proposal on homelessness builds upon AMO's housing affordability position paper: [Fixing the Housing Affordability Crisis: Municipal Recommendations for Housing in Ontario](#) (2019).

Addressing the Problem

The housing and homelessness crisis in Ontario was serious and widespread before COVID-19. The emergency brought on by the pandemic has intensified in most communities, shining a light on weaknesses in the system and highlighting the need for collective action to build back better with an inclusive economic and social recovery.

In Ontario, homelessness is experienced across the province whether urban, rural, small town, or in northern Ontario. Homelessness is visible in many instances, and less so in other cases. Some are in shelters that are filled to their capacity. Others sleep outdoors on the street, tents, cars, and abandoned buildings and farmhouses. Many are so-called couch surfing or living in other people's homes often in overcrowded conditions.

While there are not up to date figures on the extent of homelessness in Ontario in 2021, there are many people at-risk of homelessness which is an indicator of the seriousness of the issue. By 2025, there will be an estimated 159,800 'high housing need' households in Ontario that are at an elevated risk of losing their housing and experiencing homelessness ([Financial Accountability Office, 2021](#)). It is highly probable that homelessness will increase further in future years as the financial impact to households because of the pandemic is felt.

There are specific actions that can help to break the cycle of homelessness and prevent it in the first place through upstream work. There is a need to understand the root causes of homelessness, what interventions work, and what changes and contributions are needed by municipal, provincial, and federal governments. Funding for new affordable housing is critical, but there are also non-financial interventions that can be part of the solution to break the cycle of homelessness. This can include legislative, regulatory, and policy change. All necessary actions must be considered.

Ending Homelessness: How Do we Measure Success

Completely eliminating all homelessness is a bold call with an ambitious goal. However, we can strive toward the achievement of a “functional zero” standard. It is defined in the case of chronic homelessness as “a community has ended chronic homelessness when the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is zero, or if not zero, then either 3 or .1% of the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness, whichever is greater” ([Built for Zero Canada](#)).

Further, “ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience homelessness again. Rather it means that systems are in place to ensure that any experience of homelessness is brief and permanently resolved, and rare overall. As an analogy, a well-functioning health care system will not necessarily prevent people from getting sick. But it will ensure that people who fall ill are triaged appropriately and receive the services they need so their illness does not become a crisis” ([Built for Zero Canada](#)).

Ending homelessness requires both housing solutions and prevention activities. Actions can be taken to stop the inflow of new homelessness as much as possible (i.e., eliminating system-based homelessness).

The Proposal: Collaboratively Co-Developing a Blueprint to End Homelessness

There is an opportunity for AMO and municipal service managers to work together with the government on a co-design process that is collaborative and solution-focused emphasizing the potential for ‘all government’ and ‘whole of government’ integrative approaches that break down silos between orders of government, ministries, departments, and agencies. The process must leverage existing intergovernmental collaboration mechanisms using the National Housing Strategy as a platform (i.e., federal government commitment to end chronic homelessness), but producing a “made in Ontario” solution.

Indigenous People are currently overrepresented in the homeless population. The reasons are complex and specific housing interventions are necessary. Indigenous communities and Indigenous service providers must be engaged by all governments to determine what is needed to address the unique housing challenges facing Indigenous People.

The first, foundational steps to start the process for co-design and develop a blueprint to end homelessness, which ideally will be completed in 2022, are:

1. The provincial government to work with AMO and municipal service managers as equal partners to collaboratively co-design a blueprint to end homelessness, starting with chronic homelessness by 2028.
2. The provincial government and municipal service managers jointly commit to undertake an ‘all government’ and ‘whole of government’ approach to ending homelessness.
3. The provincial government appoints an executive to co-lead the development and implementation of the actions that will be identified in the Blueprint, reporting to the Premier of Ontario and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, working closely with the Chair of AMO’s Affordable Housing and Homelessness Prevention Task Force to monitor progress.
4. The provincial government and municipal service managers jointly commit to engage and consult partners, the private sector, stakeholders, and people with lived experience and expertise to inform the development of the Blueprint.
5. The provincial government and municipal service managers jointly commit to ongoing partnership with Indigenous organizations to ensure that actions in the Blueprint address Indigenous homelessness in municipal settings through culturally relevant, safe, and appropriate ways. Further, the blueprint must include joint advocacy to the federal government for specific national action to end Indigenous homelessness.

First and foremost, the process must be driven by ethical considerations but also consider the economic and municipal and provincial fiscal impact of inaction, of which there is a cost. The Blueprint must be developed immediately with short, mid-, and long-term actions identified and committed to by municipal governments, provincial ministries, federal departments, and agencies. The proposal is about establishing a process for co-design identifying initial, foundational steps with suggestions for further work to be undertaken and added to the Blueprint in time.

It is not an immediate funding ask, though there are actions that can help build the case for future government investments and support advocacy to the federal government. This proposal also is not a replacement for ongoing funding calls or ongoing pandemic responses. The process will benefit if guided by a social determinants of health approach and be informed by participation of Public Health Units. Indigenous people in urban and rural municipal settings must have their own voice in the process. Efforts should be made to engage the non-profit, co-operative, and private sectors for their respective contribution to solutions, in addition to government, along with input of people with lived experience of homelessness.

AMO is coming to the table with some ideas to start the conversation. These are outlined in Appendix A to this report. It is not an exhaustive list by any means, and the ideas will need to be prioritized. This can be accomplished through the co-design process.

Next Steps

We have an opportunity before us all to collectively end homelessness in Ontario. AMO is proposing this course of action to focus the leadership of all governments and to steer whole of government approaches. Together we can achieve this goal by working together. AMO is ready to work with the government and looks forward to starting this process as soon as possible in 2022.

Appendix A – Potential Actions for the Blueprint to End Homelessness

Examples of potential actions pursuing an integrated systems approach that could be considered in the development of the Blueprint could include, but not be limited to:

1. Develop a joint vision statement with agreed upon definitions and outcomes identified and an accountability framework.
2. Review recommendations of the Expert Advisory Panel of the Homelessness in the report, [A Place to Call Home \(Ontario 2017\)](#), and further research on what other sector actors have called for to add to the list of actions as appropriate.
3. Province-wide roll-up and analysis of municipal Housing and Homelessness Plans, Enumerations, and By-Name Lists to set priorities, targets, measure, and track progress.
4. Development of a province-wide coordinated data, research, and evaluation strategy to inform evidence-based decisions that are aligned with other data collection and reporting, including consistent methodology and knowledge translation that includes the perspectives of people with lived experience.
5. Collection and dissemination of leading practices for homelessness prevention from Ontario and other jurisdictions.
6. Risk avoidance/return on investment (ROI) study to quantify savings to other provincial and municipal service systems from housing and homelessness prevention programs to build the case for future investments by provincial, municipal, and federal governments (e.g., health care, justice, social assistance).
7. Collect consolidated information on the demand for supportive housing to quantify the actual need.
8. Assess and quantify the actual need for deeply affordable community housing units that should be available to the homeless and people at-risk of homelessness.
9. Build on the synergies of housing co-development opportunities with the long-term care sector (e.g., campuses of care, adapting LTC homes slated for redevelopment for supportive housing rather than demolition).
10. Develop strategies to ensure discharges from provincial institutions are into housing, not homelessness (e.g., prisons, hospitals, treatment facilities).
11. Develop strategies for supports to ensure that exits for youth from the child welfare system lead into housing stability, not homelessness.
12. Develop Ontario priorities for advocacy to the federal government on their contribution to end chronic homelessness (e.g., enhance and expanding Reaching Home funding to more communities, especially rural and northern ones, and providing capital funding).

13. Reconvene the National Housing Strategy Tri-lateral Coordinating Table and prioritize inter-governmental collaboration on ending homelessness through prevention and growing community housing supply by partnering with the non-profit, cooperative, and private development sectors.
14. Develop a proposal for multi-governmental arrangements with the federal government taking a localized, place-based approach to ending homelessness.
15. Advocate for the accelerated development and implementation of a national Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy by the federal government, with funding attached.
16. Develop a provincial strategy aligned with the national strategy for specific housing and homelessness prevention initiatives for Indigenous people in consultation with Indigenous communities and service providers.
17. Examine the root causes of migration from First Nations communities to regional hub centres for services (e.g., health, justice) that result in temporary, episodic homelessness and determine what interventions and supports are needed to prevent this occurrence.
18. Ensure alignment of provincial transformation initiatives with the goal of helping people to afford their housing and maintain successful tenancies (e.g., Social Assistance, Employment Services, Ontario Health Teams).
19. Identify the respective contributions of all relevant provincial ministries and agencies to ending homelessness including service delivery integration, legislative, policy, and funding decision changes (e.g., Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, Solicitor General, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Long-Term Care).
20. Commit the necessary support to resource the development and implementation of the actions outlined in the Blueprint (i.e., new and maintained funding, in-kind contributions, land donations).
21. Work with the private development sector and landlords to determine and encourage their respective contribution to help end homelessness with appropriate housing solutions both in existing stock and increased purpose-built rental housing.
22. Develop a plan to engage people with lived experience and expertise of housing need and homelessness in ongoing policy development and evaluation of the progress of the initiative to end homelessness.
23. Report out publicly on progress toward the goal of ending homelessness on an annual basis.